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New York

President:	Mr. Delattre	(France)
Members:	Bolivia (Plurinational State of)	Mr. Zambrana
	China	Mr. Zhang Dianbin
	Egypt	Mr. Aboulatta
	Ethiopia	Ms. Guadey
	Italy	Mr. Lambertini
	Japan	Mr. Bessho
	Kazakhstan	Mr. Sadykov
	Russian Federation	Mr. Nebenzia
	Senegal	Mr. Ciss
	Sweden	Mr. Skoog
	Ukraine	Mr. Yelchenko
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Rycroft
	United States of America	Mrs. Haley
	Uruguay	Mr. Bermúdez

Agenda

The situation concerning the Democratic Republic of the Congo

Report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (S/2017/824)

Special report of the Secretary-General on the strategic review of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (S/2017/826)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.10 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation concerning the Democratic Republic of the Congo

Report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (S/2017/824)

Special report of the Secretary-General on the strategic review of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (S/2017/826)

The President (*spoke in French*): In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representative of the Democratic Republic of the Congo to participate in this meeting.

On behalf of the Security Council, I welcome His Excellency Mr. Léonard She Okitundu, Vice-Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Regional Integration of the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite Mr. Maman Sidikou, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Head of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, to participate in this meeting.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I wish to draw the attention of Council members to document S/2017/824, which contains the report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

I also wish to draw the attention of Council members to document S/2017/826, which contains the special report of the Secretary-General on the strategic review of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

I now give the floor to Mr. Sidikou.

Mr. Sidikou: I would like to thank the members of the Security Council for the opportunity to brief them today on the situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

I would first like to take this opportunity to express my deepest condolences and sympathy to the families, as well as to the Government of the United Republic of Tanzania, for the deaths of the two Tanzanian peacekeepers killed in an attack on 9 October by the Allied Democratic Forces on the Mamundioma base of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO). I condemn it and all attacks on MONUSCO personnel, who serve the cause of peace and stability in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

As the Council is aware, in recent months the challenges related to the implementation of the Comprehensive and Inclusive Political Agreement of 31 December 2016 have unfortunately persisted. The broad consensus achieved among key political actors with the Agreement's signing has not been maintained consistently throughout the year, specifically as that relates to the transitional oversight mechanism — the Conseil national de suivi de l'accord — and to the implementation of confidence-building measures for sealing the Agreement and the electoral timelines. Recently, discussions have centred on the notion that elections will most probably not be held before the end of 2017, unlike what was foreseen in the Agreement. That has generated new political debate around the varying interpretations of the Agreement, particularly with regard to the implementation of the transitional arrangement in the future. Regrettably that has led in turn to the re-emergence of a climate of political uncertainty and tension.

It was in the light of those developments that on the sidelines of the opening of the General Assembly at its seventy-second session, the United Nations convened a side event on the situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The meeting welcomed the authorities' commitment to respecting the Constitution and stressed the need for further confidence-building measures to establish conditions conducive to ensuring the successful conclusion of the electoral process. The participants once again reaffirmed the centrality of the Agreement of 31 December 2016 and the importance of ensuring its full implementation in order to pave the way for the timely holding of free, fair, peaceful and credible elections. The discussions during the event acknowledged the progress made by the Independent National Electoral Commission with the voter

registration process and stressed the need for publishing an electoral calendar as soon as possible and providing a budget for the elections. The Congolese stakeholders were also urged to step up their efforts to prepare for the timely holding of free, fair, peaceful and credible presidential and legislative elections in accordance with the Agreement and, at the same time, to take additional confidence-building measures to establish an environment conducive to a successful conclusion of the electoral process.

In that regard, I would like to turn to two specific points — progress with regard to the holding of elections, and the establishment of conditions conducive to that. With regard to the first point, although the publication of an electoral calendar and a budget remain key milestones in the political process and will be essential to lowering political tensions and uncertainty as to a way forward, it is important to note that progress has been made with voter registration. As of mid-September, the Electoral Commission had registered more than 41 million voters. Women represented 48 per cent of registered voters, a slightly lower figure than in 2006, 2011 and 2016. In early September, voter-registration training began in the Kasai and Kasai Central provinces, the last remaining provinces in the country to undergo that process.

However, there is still uncertainty about the registration of members of the diaspora, the mode of voting and the timeline for enacting critical legislation. Regrettably, the financial resources required to ensure sustained progress towards the holding of elections are not yet forthcoming. The Commission is still underfunded, and the multi-partner basket support fund for the Project of Assistance to the Electoral Cycle in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, managed by the United Nations Development Programme, has reached only 6 per cent of the estimated $123 million required. Nor has MONUSCO been provided with any additional resources to support the updating of the voter registry or the broader electoral process. That is in large part due to the uncertainties about the electoral calendar and the political process going forward. The establishment of conditions conducive to the holding of elections depends largely on the implementation of confidence-building measures.

I have consistently reminded all stakeholders of their responsibility to ensure respect for rights and freedoms during this period of heightened political uncertainty. That will require full implementation of all the confidence-building measures stipulated in the Agreement, ensuring the opening of the political space and full respect for human rights, including respect for everyone's political rights and freedoms, including freedom of opinion and expression and the right to peaceful assembly. The United Nations is concerned about the fact that journalists, political opponents and civil society activists continue to be subject to intimidation, harassment and violence, mostly in connection with their activities and the expression of their opinions concerning the political process. I have repeatedly called for such actions to stop and for the rights and freedoms enshrined in the Constitution of the Democratic Republic of the Congo to be fully respected so as to establish conditions conducive to the holding of credible and peaceful elections.

(*spoke in French*)

In these politically uncertain circumstances, the security situation in several regions of the Democratic Republic of the Congo has deteriorated further, with an increase in targeted attacks on the national security forces by Mayi-Mayi groups. In North Kivu, repeated Mayi-Mayi attacks on Forces armées de la République démocratique du Congo (FARDC) positions have been taking place in an environment marked by tensions between the Hutu and Nande communities. The so-called Allied Democratic Forces have also attempted to seize several FARDC positions. In South Kivu, Mayi-Mayi groups have been carrying out attacks on several strategic FARDC installations since the end of June. Less than two weeks ago, Mayi-Mayi Yakutumba mounted an attack on Uvira, the second-largest city in South Kivu province, and was only repulsed thanks to a rapid and robust response from MONUSCO and exemplary coordination with the FARDC. The complexity of the current situation in South Kivu was tragically illustrated on 15 September when, in clashes with Burundian asylum seekers, Congolese security forces resorted to excessive force, resulting in 37 Burundians killed and 117 wounded. One FARDC soldier was also killed, and six FARDC soldiers and one national police officer were wounded. That tragedy should never have happened. We should add that, following that incident, two members of the FARDC were arrested, and MONUSCO initiated an investigation into the Blue Helmets' response during those events.

Besides the situation in North and South Kivu, in Tanganyika province the clashes between the Twa and

Luba militias have again increased, against the backdrop of a resurgence in Mayi-Mayi Kata-Katanga activities and emerging divisions among several Twa militias. The security situation in the western part of the country remains volatile, following major clashes between the Bundu Dia Mayala political-religious sect and security forces in Kinshasa and Kongo Central. Violent incidents continue in the Kasai region, involving clashes between Kamuina Nsapu militia and security forces as well as inter-ethnic conflicts. I firmly condemn the attacks by the Kamuina Nsapu, the recruitment of children and the targeting of schools, churches and other protected sites, as well as the incidents of disproportionate use of force and deliberate targeting of civilians attributed to the Congolese armed forces. The violence must stop and its perpetrators must be held accountable.

The impact of the deteriorating security situation on civilian life is clearly visible. Between June and August, MONUSCO identified 1,329 cases of violations or abuses of human rights. Armed groups carried out 533 attacks, while State actors accounted for 769 violations, of which 27 per cent were attributed to the armed forces and 24 per cent to national police. On top of that, the worsening humanitarian situation is clear evidence of the impact of the conflict on the civilian population. We estimate that about 8.5 million people, including 5.5 million children, are currently in need of humanitarian assistance. The number of internally displaced persons has reached 3.8 million, and more than 621,000 Congolese have sought refuge in various areas of the subregion, such as Angola, Zambia and so forth. In the Kasai region alone, some 2.8 million people are facing critical levels of food insecurity, and more than 1.5 million children continue to face the risk of violence, displacement and loss of access to education and medical services.

Despite the significant challenges that the evolving situation presents, MONUSCO has continued to adjust its deployment and presence to better adapt its footprint to the priorities set out in resolution 2348 (2017), with a view to maximizing its effectiveness in the face of budget cuts. It has modified its sector boundaries to enable the force to redeploy its troops in the eastern provinces and to intervene with more flexibility throughout the country. The Mission has also improved the mobility of the Intervention Brigade and strengthened its presence in the Kasai region, largely through redeployments of civilian, military and police personnel.

In order to respect the ceiling on military personnel numbers authorized under resolution 2348 (2017) and to meet the new budget requirements, the Mission will soon complete the repatriation of 1,687 military units. MONUSCO is also in the process of introducing and testing a new strategy of protection by projection, specifically aimed at areas affected by the closure of MONUSCO bases and designed to provide the mission with greater flexibility in fulfilling its mandate to protect civilians.

In conclusion, I would like to emphasize MONUSCO's commitment to supporting, through its good offices, the principles of the Agreement of 31 December 2016, which represent the only viable way to create the necessary conditions for holding credible and peaceful elections in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Publishing a realistic electoral calendar, establishing a budget for the elections, implementing measures to ease tensions and ensuring respect for fundamental rights and freedoms are the main conditions that must be now be met in order to advance the political process. In that regard, while United Nations support is essential, it is not enough. Regional actors, including the African Union, the Southern African Development Community and the Economic Community of Central African States, have a key role to play in helping all the stakeholders in the Democratic Republic of the Congo to meet the challenges they are facing and in advancing the political process for the holding of elections. In that context, the recent visit of the Chairperson of the African Union Commission represents a significant reinforcement of the international community's collective efforts to help the Democratic Republic of the Congo make progress towards holding elections. Only through joint efforts, in solidarity and synergy, can the obstacles facing the Democratic Republic of the Congo be overcome.

The President (*spoke in French*): I thank Mr. Sidikou for his briefing.

I shall now give the floor to those members of the Council who wish to make statements.

Mr. Bermúdez (Uruguay) (*spoke in Spanish*): I would like to start by welcoming the presence of Mr. Léonard She Okitundu, Vice-Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Regional Integration of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. We also thank Mr. Maman Sidikou, Special Representative of the Secretary-General, for his briefing, and reiterate

our appreciation for his entire team and the staff of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) for the work they are doing in very difficult conditions.

I would like to once again reaffirm Uruguay's commitment to establishing peace and stability in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. I speak not just as a non-permanent member of the Security Council but also as representative of a country that has been contributing troops to MONUSCO for the past 17 years without interruption. I would like to outline Uruguay's assessment of three aspects of the situation — the accumulating political delays, their impact on the security, humanitarian and human rights situations, and the role of MONUSCO in dealing with the current situation.

First, we are concerned about the fact that the broad consensus reached between the key political actors through the signing on 31 December 2016 of the Comprehensive and Inclusive Political Agreement is rapidly eroding, thanks to significant divisions among the signatories. The continuing delays in the implementation of the Agreement, thanks to the lack of genuine commitment among parties, have seriously jeopardized the possibility of holding elections before the end of the year, as stipulated in the Agreement, and have done nothing but heighten the political and institutional uncertainty. In order to deal with this, Uruguay strongly urges all the political stakeholders who signed the Agreement — including the Government, which has a special role to play by virtue of its sovereign responsibilities — to create the conditions necessary to advance the political process. There is no more time to lose.

Uruguay endorses the repeated requests by the Secretary-General, the Council and the African Union for the speedy publication of a credible calendar for the holding of elections, in accordance with the provisions of the agreement. It would not only significantly reduce uncertainty among the Congolese people but would also enable the various partners — including the United Nations, whose technical and financial support remain important for the conduct of elections — to better determine the type of support they will have to provide.

Secondly, the stagnation of the political process is clearly having a negative effect on the security, humanitarian and human rights situation. It is always the civilian population that suffers most in such crises. As the Secretary-General's report (S/2017/824) points out, the security situation has continued to worsen in many areas of the Democratic Republic of the Congo in the past few months. We also continue to be concerned about the number of human rights abuses and violations documented by MONUSCO, including the continuing shrinking of the democratic space and violations of civil and political rights, especially the right to peaceful assembly and freedom of opinion and expression.

We urge the Government authorities to take decisive action to end impunity. That will involve strong Government measures aimed at bringing to justice any individual responsible for human rights violations, including members of the national police and armed forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. With regard to the militias operating in the country, a truly horrifying video has been circulated recently of a public rape and execution that took place in April in the city of Luebo in Kasai province. While many were responsible, the main perpetrator was Kalamba Kambangoma, the head of the Kamuina Nsapu rebel group. Acts such as these make us reflect and urge that such evidence be brought before the International Criminal Court so that the murderer and his followers can be sentenced as soon as possible. Those realities, exacerbated by a fragile economic situation, have led to a worrying humanitarian situation, with more than 8.5 million people in need of humanitarian assistance and almost 4 million displaced from their homes. I reiterate once again that those negative trends cannot improve as long as the political actors do not make tangible progress with the political process. Hence the crucial importance of the immediate and full implementation of the Agreement of 31 December 2016.

Thirdly, Uruguay acknowledges the efforts that MONUSCO has continued to make with the goal of turning its force into a more agile, flexible and receptive instrument. However, in that regard I should reiterate my delegation's views as expressed during the renewal of the mandate in March (see S/PV.7910) and the previous briefing session in July (see S/PV.7998). We are concerned about the reduction in MONUSCO troop numbers at a time when there the violence in the Democratic Republic of the Congo is increasing significantly. We have taken note of the special report (S/2017/826) of the Secretary-General on the recently published strategic review of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. We acknowledge the

comprehensive and serious work done at the direction of the Department of Peacekeeping Operations, and it is important to us. We should also emphasize that the Secretariat has already clearly indicated the limits of the tasks that MONUSCO can carry out in its present configuration and given the current situation on the ground. We encourage MONUSCO to continue focusing on the Mission's two strategic priorities, the protection of civilians and support for the implementation of the Agreement of 31 December 2016.

In conclusion, I would like to express our condolences to the Government of the United Republic of Tanzania for the death of two of its Blue Helmets as a result of the deliberate attacks perpetrated by the Allied Democratic Forces armed group. We firmly condemn those attacks and call for those responsible to be brought to justice.

Mr. Zambrana (Plurinational State of Bolivia) (*spoke in Spanish*): At the outset, we would like to welcome the presence of Mr. Léonard She Okitundu, Vice-Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Regional Integration of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Bolivia is also grateful for the briefing from Mr. Maman Sidikou, Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO). We thank him for his mediating efforts and his support to the authorities of the Democratic Republic of the Congo in strengthening the security and stability in the country.

We deplore the recent attack on MONUSCO by the Allied Democratic Forces, offer our deepest condolences to the families, the people and the Government of Tanzania for their loss of two members of their contingent in that attack and hope that the injured recover swiftly. We condemn the current climate of violence and the deterioration of the security situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. We regret that the new areas of conflict that have emerged include disputes over access to natural resources, conflicts between armed and intercommunal groups and ethnic violence.

We firmly condemn the actions that have resulted, as Mr. Sidikou mentioned, in approximately 8.5 million people, including 5.5 million children, needing humanitarian assistance. We deplore the fact that 3.8 million people have been internally displaced, an increase of 16 per cent since January, according to the Secretary-General's latest report (S/2017/824). We also condemn all actions aimed at intensifying intercommunal tensions and inciting violence, as well as any acts of sexual exploitation. We believe that all such acts, including those in which the national police have participated, should be duly investigated and the people responsible brought to justice and tried in the appropriate courts.

Bolivia supports the political initiatives and recommendations of the Secretary-General's report (S/2017/825) on the implementation of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Region, which seeks, among other things, to have a positive effect on the plans for disarmament, demobilization and reintegration, as well as for the repatriation, resettlement and reintegration of the various insurgent groups, both Congolese and foreigners, operating within the Democratic Republic of the Congo. We also commend MONUSCO's increased efforts to bring security to civilians, and we encourage it to continue working for peace and stability in the region, in coordination with the military forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and in accordance with its mandate.

The current political stalemate and uncertainty about elections are crucial issues that must be resolved if we are to put an end to insecurity in the region. Progress on the political situation is essential, and we reiterate that the principles of preventive diplomacy and good offices aimed at reaching a negotiated political solution that respects the sovereignty of the Democratic Republic of the Congo must not be neglected. In that regard, we note the convening of a forum for reconciliation in the Kasai region in Kananga on 19 September, and we call on the parties to implement the confidence-building measures contained in the political agreement.

In that regard, Bolivia believes that the Comprehensive and Inclusive Political Agreement in the Democratic Republic of the Congo signed on 31 December 2016 between the Government and the opposition represents a solid foundation establishing a road map for organizing presidential elections in accordance with the country's Constitution and resolution 2277 (2016). We believe that the Agreement should be respected and supported by all stakeholders with the aim of holding peaceful, credible, inclusive and timely elections that can lead to a peaceful transfer of power. In that regard, we call on the signatories to

the Agreement to create the conditions that can enable the political process to make progress and materialize.

We also call for the adoption of an agreed-on election calendar to be published by the Independent National Electoral Commission and for the completion of voter registration, in accordance with the Agreement. As updated by 10 September, voter registration had reached 41 million, of which we would like to emphasize that 48 per cent are women. We commend the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, the Special Envoy for the the Great Lakes Region and MONUSCO for using their good offices in collaboration with national political stakeholders and Government authorities to encourage implementation of the Agreement.

Strengthening dialogue and cooperation with regional and subregional partners is key to preventing and settling conflicts. We therefore commend the call by the Southern African Development Community for the publication of an elections calendar and by the Peace and Security Council of the African Union for providing the Electoral Commission with the necessary resources to implement the Agreement of 31 December 2016. Bolivia urges them, the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region and the Economic Community of Central African States to hold periodic consultations with the United Nations, the African Union and other international stakeholders so as to ensure that the region and the international community support the implementation of that agreement.

Finally, I would like to say that we are firmly believe that it is African initiatives and the Congolese people and their institutions who should make decisions about the future of their country. Our duty is to support those decisions and respect their sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity. It is our belief that that will be a decisive factor in the promotion of peace and stability and the development of the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Mr. She Okitundu (Democratic Republic of the Congo) (*spoke in French*): At the outset, it is my honour to congratulate you, Mr. President, on assuming the presidency of the Security Council for the month of October, andhow honoured we are to see France presiding over the deliberations of the Council today. I would also like to thank you sincerely for taking the initiative to organize this meeting on the situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and to assure you of our support and cooperation throughout your mandate.

I would be remiss if I did not once again express my gratitude to the Council, on behalf of the Congolese Government and people, for its remarkable continued efforts to help my country restore much-needed stability and harness the energy it needs for its development. I would also like to welcome and express my esteem for Secretary-General António Guterres for his commitment and personal involvement in the quest for peaceful solutions to the situation in my country.

Before I proceed, on behalf of the Government of my country, I would like to strongly condemn the attacks on peacekeepers perpetrated by the Allied Democratic Forces in North Kivu, which resulted in the death of two Tanzanian Blue Helmets and injured 18 others. My country offers its deepest condolences to the United Nations and the Government of Tanzania, as well as to the victims' families.

My delegation takes note of the reports of the Secretary-General on the implementation of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Region (S/2017/825) and on the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (S/2017/824), issued on 29 September and 2 October respectively, and we thank Mr. Maman Samba Sidikou, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for the Democratic Republic of the Congo, who has just presented them. While we appreciate the reports' content, we believe it is important to clarify a number of points that deserve the Council's attention. In that regard, I would like to say a few words about the political situation in my country, with particular emphasis on the implementation of the Comprehensive and Inclusive Political Agreement of 31 December 2016 and the electoral process, as well as on the security situation and the strategic dialogue.

With regard to the implementation of the Agreement, as indicated in the Secretary-General's report of 15 August 2017 (S/2017/712), following the establishment of a Government of National Unity, the Conseil national de suivi de l'accord was created. It is functioning and is headed by a member of the Rassemblement opposition. I will come back to that in a moment.

With regard to the electoral process, as the Council knows, the process of updating the electoral register has entered its final phase with the enrolment of voters in Kasai and Kasai Central provinces, as well as in the territories of Luilu and Kamiji in Lomami province, all of which have been in turmoil in the wake of the deplorable events involving the Kamuina Nsapu militia. Of 45 million expected voters, 42 million have already been registered. As we can see, my country is well and truly on the road to holding elections. The question that everyone on the Council has asked today is about the electoral calendar. In answer to that, I can say that the Conseil national de suivi de l'accord, together with the Independent National Electoral Commission and the Government, has begun evaluating the electoral process, and that the calendar will be published as soon as that is done. The Council is no doubt aware, however, that the Commission published draft calendars on two previous occasions, in 2014 and 2015, which were not only systematically rejected by the opposition but also did not receive the expected support from the international community. As a result, the elections have been postponed until now.

Moreover, for logistical, financial, security and legal reasons, the President of the Independent National Electoral Commission announced several months ago that the three elections planned for December could not take place at that time. That announcement continues to give rise to differing views on the legitimacy of my country's institutions thereafter. It seems hardly necessary to affirm in that regard that the institutions of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, like those of other States around the world, derive their legitimacy from the Constitution. The Comprehensive and Inclusive Political Agreement, signed at Kinshasa's Interdiocesan Centre and based specifically on our desire to organize peaceful, credible and transparent elections, also commits the signatories to respect for the Constitution. Paragraph 2.1 of chapter 2 of the Agreement states that

> "[t]he parties commit to respecting the Constitution of 18 February 2006, as amended in 2011, and the laws of the Republic, and to organize presidential, legislative, national and provincial elections, as well as local elections, in conformity with the Constitution."

As for the possibility of postponing the elections, paragraph 4.2 of chapter 4 of the Agreement states that

> "[t]he parties agree to organize elections in a single presidential, legal, national and provincial sequence in December 2017 at the latest. Nevertheless, the Conseil national de suivi de l'accord, the Government and the Independent National Electoral Commission can unanimously evaluate the timeline required for the finalization of election dates."

A second evaluation meeting is planned for 12 to 14 October 2017 in order to make that decision. To conclude this point, it is important to underscore that the Democratic Republic of the Congo is firmly committed to the irreversibility of organizing the elections, as President Joseph Kabila Kabange stated from the rostrum of the General Assembly Hall (see A/72/PV.19). But we must ensure that they are strong elections that will be conducive to a peaceful transition of power and can avoid the unfortunate turmoil that marked the previous elections, in 2006 and 2011.

On the security front, both reports mention the activities of armed groups in the eastern part of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, as well as in certain States of the Great Lakes region. With regard to my country specifically, our armed forces are continuing their fight to eradicate such groups in collaboration with the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO). Given those negative forces' unconventional operating methods, my country is of the view that MONUSCO should aim at maximum effectiveness by providing the Intervention Brigade with the means that can enable it to fulfil the tasks assigned to it under resolution 2348 (2017).

As regards the former combatants of the Mouvement du 23 mars (M-23), in my statement to the Council in August (see S/PV.8026), I brought members up to date on the political and military activities of those ex-rebels in the neighbouring countries where they had found refuge, a situation that has also been brought to the attention of the authorities of those countries. For that reason, my Government has appealed to the Council to put pressure on the countries involved to comply with their commitments under the Addis Ababa agreement, and that we should also consider imposing sanctions on the former M-23's leaders. The disappearance of more than 900 M-23 members cantoned in the Bihanga military camp is very worrying. According to information from various sources, including the tripartite meeting of the Democratic Republic of the

Congo, the Central African Republic and South Sudan in Kinshasa from 2 to 4 September, they will be joining various armed groups operating in the Central African Republic, Burundi and South Sudan as well as in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The Council will agree that this development could harm peace and stability in the entire region.

With regard to these issues, President Kabange and his Ugandan counterpart, President Yoweri Museveni, decided at their most recent meeting to coordinate their efforts to eradicate negative forces in the region and to launch joint operations shortly. The report also mentions the possibility of Uganda's granting refugee status to these former rebels, a possibility that my country will verify through the appropriate channels before discussing it with the Ugandan Government. If the persons concerned meet the requirements of the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, the decision of the Office of the High Commissioner for Refugees will be final.

In my various statements I have always brought up the issue of the 340 combatants of the Forces démocratiques de libération du Rwanda who are still waiting to be repatriated in transit sites in Kanyabayonga in North Kivu, Walungu in South Kivu and Kisangani in Tshopo. I once again reiterate my Government's call to the international community to repatriate them to their countries of origin or, failing that, to a third-party country outside the Great Lakes region.

Concerning the combatants of the Sudan People's Liberation Army quartered in Munigi, Dungu and Goma in North Kivu, my Government appreciates the efforts made in that regard by MONUSCO in collaboration with the Governments of South Sudan and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Those efforts have resulted in the repatriation of eight of them and the relocation of 58 others to Ethiopia, Kenya and Sudan. My Government hopes that those efforts will continue until all those still in the transit sites are either repatriated or relocated to third-party countries.

To bring this chapter to a close, I should briefly mention that calm returned yesterday to the provinces of Kasai and Kasai Central, which suffered terrorist attacks by the Kamuina Nsapu militia. Investigations have been opened to shed light on the exact circumstances of the crimes committed, establish accountability for them and identify their perpetrators with a view to punishing them. The local population, which had sought refuge in neighbouring provinces and in Angola, is beginning to return. In order to restore their confidence and promote peaceful coexistence, the President of the Republic, at the end of his visit to the provinces concerned with the purpose of reassuring the people, initiated and presided over a forum on peace, reconciliation and development, involving all the stakeholders in those provinces.

As I emphasized to the Council two months ago, the major remaining challenge in that part of the country is a humanitarian one. Caring for the internally and externally displaced persons who are returning demands that we mobilize all our partners for urgent assistance.

With regard to the strategic dialogue — beyond the first phase, which was held in March 2016 — resolution 2348 (2017) provides for the dialogue between the Government and MONUSCO to continue. In that regard, the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo believes that the withdrawal of the United Nations forces should be carried out gradually in three phases. The first should be carried out in areas where MONUSCO's presence is no longer necessary, the second in areas where the concentration of forces is greater than the threat, and the third in the areas where threats persist or new challenges are emerging. With regard to the composition of MONUSCO's contingents, we believe that the Intervention Brigade should be the last force to leave the territory of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, given the nature of its actions and its origin.

This morning I have heard concern and even uncertainty from members of the Council regarding the implementation of the Agreement and the organization of the elections. I will try to put that into perspective. The situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo is no worse than in other countries in similar circumstances. With regard, first, to the comments about the disproportionate use of force, there is absolutely no deliberate policy for using disproportionate force. If such cases occur, it is individuals who are responsible, and those individuals would be punished and condemned. With regard to freedom of expression and the freedom to demonstrate, I would like to remind the Council that we are bound by the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which cannot be broken — its freedoms are absolute, but their interpretation can be relative. Restrictions do exist, but such restrictions are necessary in all democratic societies. In our country, an instance of people inciting to insurrection through a demonstration clearly does not fall within the context

of the democratic exercise of the freedom of expression. Public order requires and takes precedence over the exercise of that freedom.

That is why I would like to assure the Council of the determination of the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo to see the Agreement of 31 December implemented, which it is doing, despite all the concerns I have heard today.

As far as the organization of elections is concerned, the main condition for getting that done is determining who the electors are. And as I said earlier, the voter registration process will be finalized in around 30 days. After that, and as the Independent National Electoral Commission has promised, the electoral calendar will be published, and we will know when the elections are to take place. I wanted to put the concerns that I have just heard into perspective.

In its quest to achieve peace and stability in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, my Government appreciates the support that it has received from international and regional organizations, including the African Union, the International Organization of la Francophonie, the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region of Africa, the Southern African Development Community and many others. This is an opportunity for my country to pay tribute and express our gratitude to them, as well as to the troop-contributing countries. I would like to reiterate the gratitude of my Government to all members of the Council for their commitment to the cause of peace in my country.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now invite Council members to informal consultations to continue our discussion of the subject.

The meeting rose at 10.55 a.m.